

Croatia decides new restrictions as virus surges

November 6 2021, by Darko Bandic



People wait to be vaccinated against COVID-19 in Zagreb, Croatia, Thursday, Nov. 4, 2021. Countries throughout Central and Eastern Europe reported spiraling coronavirus cases Thursday, with several hitting new daily records in the regions that have lower vaccination rates than the rest of the continent. Croatia, Slovenia and Slovakia reported their highest numbers of daily cases of the pandemic, while other countries registered the most infections in months. Credit: AP Photo/Darko Bandic

Croatian authorities will limit gatherings and widen the use of COVID-19 passes to curb soaring infections after the numbers of infected people hit new records again on Friday.

The country's crisis team said after a meeting that the new rules for gatherings will apply starting Saturday while the use of COVID passes will take more time to prepare.

Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic complained that vaccination is going "at snail's pace" after reaching some 50% of the population of 4.2 million.

"That is not normal," Plenkovic said, according to the state HRT television. "We have had a pandemic for nearly two years, more than 5 million people have died, and we have a situation where some of our citizens still do not realize the danger COVID-19 poses."

Like much of Central and Eastern Europe, Croatia has seen a huge rise in infections and hospitalizations in the past weeks due to low vaccination rates and relaxed virus rules.

Most countries in the region have vaccination rates of about 50% or less, which is lower than the European Union average of about 75%.

Alarmed by the raging virus, some Croats who so far have not gotten vaccinated could be seen lining up Thursday evening to get a jab at a vaccination point in the capital Zagreb.

Drago Coric said he had been "skeptical" about vaccines but changed his mind after daily new cases peaked to several thousand.

Croatia reported nearly 7,000 new infections on Friday after confirming around 6,300 a day before.

"There are lot of (people) today and lately who have been infected," he said. Coric added he came to get his first shot "for safety."

Blaz, who gave only his first name, said he wants to have full freedom in the coming holiday season when relatives from abroad come to visit.

"I don't want to be restricted with movement and measures that will be imposed apparently," he said.

Interior Minister Davor Bozinovic announced that only gatherings of up to 50 people will be allowed indoors from Saturday and they must end by midnight.

Bozinovic also said COVID passes will be introduced for employees in all state institutions, including the education system from mid-November.

Previously, Croatia had introduced the passes in health and social care systems, requiring proof of vaccination, a certificate that someone has had COVID-19 or a negative test.

Bozinovic said that depending on the situation, the use could be further extended.

"We will monitor the situation," said Bozinovic. "There is enough time for those who have not managed so far to vaccinate."

Most governments in the region have been reluctant to revert to lockdowns in response to the rise in infections, but have sought instead to boost vaccination.

In Slovenia, a government meeting will be held later Friday to discuss what measures to take amid reports in local media of divisions on the

issue among ministers.

Slovenia has seen record numbers in the past weeks that have forced hospitals to scrap any non-urgent interventions. In a joint statement, medical directors of Slovenia's hospitals said they are facing the most difficult days since the outbreak.

"We will do everything in our power," the statement said, according to the STA news agency.

The small EU state of 2 million people reported 3,770 additional cases on Friday.

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